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## THE ROUND TABLE

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### UP TO THE TIMES IN THE CLASSROOM

"Bring the *Times* to class tomorrow as a text," is an assignment that has not yet ceased to startle the pupils of our school. But it is usually a pleasant "startle," as the newspaper is a tangible something in their lives, much more real than Macaulay's *Johnson* or Gray's *Elegy*. It may be that they are familiar with the paper only through the funny page, the woman's column, or the sporting news, but it has at least a place in their consciousness.

We plan to cover the newspaper in about ten lessons, with, of course, abundant outside reading and investigation, which form the basis of oral reports. On our library shelves we have Opdycke's *News Ads and Sales*, Givens' *The Newspaper*, Dibblee's *The Making of a Newspaper*, Ross's *The Writing of News*, and other good books on the newspaper. After the first general lessons the class is referred to these books and is assigned oral reports on chapters correlating with the lesson topic of the day.

To begin our study, every girl in the class having a newspaper before her, I put such questions as these: "What is the latest war news?" "What boat sails for Europe tomorrow?" "What bill is up in Congress?" "How is Bethlehem steel selling?" "What is the biggest bit of news in New York City today?" "Who won the World Series?" These questions, varied of course to suit the occasion, show the pupil the different kinds of news handled in a paper. At the close of the recitation it is well to tabulate the various kinds into domestic, foreign, national, and local; and further, into financial, shipping, political, social, etc.

The general make-up of the paper gives material for another lesson. I have found it a good plan to point the way to this by asking a pupil why she takes a certain paper every day. This will generally elicit the answer that she is used to that paper, knows where to find the news; which is an obvious lead to arrangement. If at this lesson every girl is provided with the paper with which she is familiar, a comparison of arrangements can be made, bringing out that each paper has a definite plan of make-up.

The study of the first page follows logically. The name of a paper is an interesting subject of discussion. Pupils are delighted to trace the meaning and significance of newspaper names. The emblem and the slogan or motto are other interesting features. The type, the number and width of columns—all are distinctive marks of a paper about which the pupils have never before thought. The placing of news according to its importance often opens up a consideration of what constitutes news and an investigation of various first pages to see how newspapers differ in their selections. The most important news, the dispatch, the filler, the last-minute news, all demand discussion, which branches off frequently to a consideration of the cable, the wireless, the Associated Press, and all modern news-getting and news-circulating devices.

The next step may be a lesson on the news item. We analyze various items into headlines, lead, and the article proper—see their mechanism, so to speak. Abundant practice in the writing of news items is then given. It is well, I think, to start with topics of school interest, then to take items of current importance, branching from these to such subjects as "The Theft of Marner's Gold," "The Tournament in Ivanhoe," "The Release of Dr. Manette," or others taken from literary study. Keen interest is usually awakened by the attempts to write these articles in newspaper form.

The study of headlines is always a joy to the class. They like piling words in pyramid or indented form. We consider, first, types of headlines, both as to form and content, the class bringing illustrations from various papers. The pupils then try their skill. I often ask them to headline an article which I read from the morning paper so that they may compare their headlines with the original, or I give them a topic about which they write a news item and headline it in various styles.

We usually attack the editorial page last, and it may easily occupy several lessons. In one, we tear a typical editorial to pieces, note the division into fact and opinion, and classify the fact as the editor's lead or text. If the class has studied the essay, the editorial is easily grasped as a miniature essay; if the essay is yet to be studied, the editorial is a helpful stepping-stone. After we have "got the hang" of an editorial and have read a number of editorials brought in from different papers, we write some on suggested topics. This is excellent composition practice.

The letters to the editor make an interesting study too. Many schoolroom grievances are aired in this form and natural spontaneous expression brought about. Cartoons, as picture editorials, are intensely live, and, through special reports, familiarity with eminent cartoonists

and their work makes spicy diversion. Then in this day of column writers there is the funny column of the editorial page, at which classes like to try their wits.

As ours is a commercial school, the commercial department relieves the English teacher from an analysis of the financial page. This is thoroughly handled until the stock quotations and the rise and fall of markets cease to be Greek to the newspaper initiate. Newspaper advertising is dealt with very briefly in a general way, merely as an introduction to the study of advertising which is taken up later in the English course.

An excellent method of crystallizing newspaper study is to allow a class to get out a news sheet. This was tried in our classes with great success. The pupils were organized into a regular newspaper staff, with editor, assistants, reporters, advertisers, artists, etc. Each pupil had her duties. The reporters were given special assignments to cover, such as club meetings, interviews with the principal, or social gatherings. For a few days the classroom became a live newspaper office, with copy-writers, headliners, and artists busily at work. Fortunately, the girls were studying typewriting, so the columns were typed and a small folio paper, a class weekly, appeared. It was a finished newspaper in miniature, excellent as to form and content. It now forms part of our permanent English exhibit.

Our school paper, too, gives an opportunity for practical newspaper work. Nearly all of the girls who made up the staff have had class newspaper work, and I feel that they are much the better for it. This year a daily newspaper is posted on the bulletin board in our library. It is made up of the best clippings from the morning papers, classified and arranged. The newspaper classes are responsible for this, students taking turns in posting it. It gives them excellent practice in testing news values and in make-up.

"But what good does this study do," perhaps someone will object, "if you are not training students to be journalists?" I think it has very definite good results for all pupils. In the first place, the newspaper can be very readily linked with literature. The *Sir Roger de Coverley* papers, for instance, will take on a new aspect if they are attacked by a newspaper class and treated as a part in the evolution of the newspaper. As newspaper articles they become real, and afford an excellent basis for comparison of eighteenth- and twentieth-century journalism. Further, they may give opportunity for some work on the great papers of the world, both past and present.

And too, if we present some of our authors as newspaper men, a class is bound to think them more human—more get-at-able—and to take more interest in them. I know that William Cullen Bryant is more of a personality to my class since they realize that he was once the editor of the *New York Evening Post*, and, vice versa, the *Post* receives new consideration from them for having had William Cullen Bryant as its editor! In that same connection, I believe that the statue of Horace Greeley in Greeley Square means more to my pupils since they know the *New York Tribune* and its history.

Secondly, the composition value of a newspaper course is incalculable. There is nothing better to teach concise, adequate expression than the writing of headlines and leads. In addition, a class trained in this soon learns to pick out the salient features of any lesson. On the other hand, if occasionally newspaper space-writing leads to padding, I think a bit of journalistic imagination is not a drawback to the average high-school boy or girl whose most frequent complaint is, "I can't think of anything more to write."

From a still broader viewpoint the gain is obvious. The pupils have a first-hand knowledge of the working of one of the most powerful forces in the modern world, and a standard of discrimination between the good and bad in journalism. The newspaper-reading habit has been inculcated. I do not say that all my girls are devouring the daily paper, but a much bigger percentage of them know what is going on in the world at large. More of them read the editorial page. Hardly a week passes without someone's bringing me a newspaper clipping that she thinks the class may enjoy. Our librarian is beset with clippings, many of which are making up a valuable file of general information.

To be sure, the newspaper study has to be followed up by the teacher. Our English classes ever after write compositions occasionally in newspaper form. I take many opportunities to bring to the attention of my classes items of interest in the daily paper and to test them on what they have read and so keep them alert to what is going on in the world.

MARGERY GORDON

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
JULIA RICHMAN HIGH SCHOOL, NEW YORK CITY